Latent Selfhood and the Problem of Genre in Catalina de Erauso’s *Historia de la Monja Alferez*

El presente artículo mantiene que Historia de la Monja Alférez saca a luz una teoría de subjetividad fundamentada en los géneros literarios y coextensiva con el acto de escribir como tal. A su base, surgen múltiples estrategias de disimulación y decepción. Con el fin de analizar esta teoría de subjetividad y sus estrategias concomitantes en el texto, el artículo se dividirá en dos secciones. En primer lugar, se examinará cómo la disimulación y la descontextualización acaban creando una imagen confusa de la persona masculina de Erauso, la cual depende principalmente del uso ingenioso de la decisi verbal. Esto se ejemplifica en momentos en que las palabras, las acciones y la apariencia del narrador en primera persona no distinguen entre Catalina y Antonio, es decir, entre sujeto y persona enmascarada. Centrándose en las escenas de cortejo en Historia, el artículo afirmará después que la formación de subjetividad también ocurre a nivel meta-textual, donde el disfraz masculino de Erauso asume una dimensión literaria como un libro de vida, género típicamente varonil. La apropiación de este género permite que Erauso emplee la escritura para sustituir su feminidad por una subjetividad masculina.

The complex relation between gender and genre in Catalina de Erauso’s *Historia de la Monja Alférez* has long been a natural drawing point for scholars of early modern European literature. After its redaction and first wave of popularity in the mid-seventeenth century, the text fell into relative obscurity until its publication in book form in 1829, which, according to Eva Mendieta, “spawned innumerable reworkings, translations, plays, and poetry, all based on the protagonist” (22). Rainer Goetz, for his part, argues that the intersection of gendered selfhood and genre within *Historia* leaves the impression that “if it were not for the knowledge of the author’s biological sex, the overwhelming
majority of the experiences narrated in the *Vida i sucesos* [i.e., *Historia*] could have been written by a man" (100).

At the most literal level, the question of gender is paramount in *Historia* because early on in Erauso's account of her travels from the Basque Country to colonial Peru (and beyond), she disguises herself as a man. Beyond changing her physical appearance through dress, she also adopts the names "Francisco" and "Antonio" as a means of deceiving those who would otherwise force her back into the convent in St. Sebastian. At another level, however, it becomes apparent that Erauso's textual *I* becomes increasingly fungible as the text progresses. At some points in the text she refers to herself as a man (a mode of reference upon which she eventually settles), at others she calls herself Catalina, and still at others the referent to which the first-person singular subject pronoun corresponds is impossible to determine. This indeterminacy of the narrated self—the textual *I*—is related to theories of context and identity in the seventeenth century and, perhaps even more importantly, to the frameworks of discursive and textual genre within which Erauso (and her readers) operated.

The present article contends that *Historia* fleshes out a theory of early modern selfhood that is genre-based and coextensive with the act of writing itself. Central to this theory of genre- and text-based selfhood, I argue, are strategies of misrepresentation and deception. In order to unpack these theories and show how they shape Erauso's text, I will focus on two aspects of *Historia*. First, I will examine how Erauso's narrative abounds with strategically undetermined and decontextualized verbal presentations of self that become confused with her masculine persona, a move that depends primarily on lifting deictic signs from their contexts of utterance and rendering them in written form. To decontextualize common deictic terms such as "I," "you," "here," and "there" strips them of a semantic referent, given that they acquire meaning through use in a specific context. In *Historia*, this decontextualization is exemplified by moments when the words, actions, and appearance that make up the first-person narrator's disguise fail to distinguish between Catalina and Antonio, subject and persona (or vice versa). Focusing on the courtship scenes contained within *Historia*, I will then argue that this self-fashioning also takes place at a deeper meta-textual level, where Erauso matches her masculine garb by dressing up her narrative in a self-representational genre predominately associated with the masculine. By making use of the *libro de vida* genre, or

what Goetz calls the "experiential" form of self-representation, Erauso frequently masks her feminine self by privileging readings that frame her as masculine (95).

**Erauso's *I* Muddled in the Manuscripts**

It is important to point out from the outset that the question of genre and gender in *Historia* materially intersects with problems surrounding its extant manuscripts. While recent Erauso scholarship generally agrees that Catalina was a real person, corroborated by extant relatos (personal accounts) and other fan fiction that lionized her, the original manuscript has been lost.1 Further still, there is no way to ascertain whether Catalina dictated its content to a scribe with a literary background, penned it herself, or if somebody else wrote it as a work of fiction. What is certain is that in 1625, she submitted the manuscript to Bernardo de Guzmán's printing press in Madrid (Vallbona 2). The princes followed a dizzying trail until turning up in the files of Domingo de Urbizu, chief constable of Seville's Casa de Contratación de Indias in the eighteenth century. Not long after the ink dried on the original copy, the poet Cándido María Trigueros decided to jot down his own copy, which served as the basis for Juan Baustista Muñoz's manuscript published on May 24, 1784, and archived in the Biblioteca de la Real Academia de Historia. It was not until 1829 that Joaquín María Ferrer, who had received a copy of the 1784 manuscript from Felipe Bouza shortly before his exile in Paris, printed *Historia* as a monograph for the first time (Esteban 31). A few anachronisms and incorrect dates aside, most contemporary editions of *Historia* are based on Muñoz's manuscript, Ferrer's book edition, or a synthesis of the two.

Notwithstanding the lack of critical consensus regarding the accuracy of these versions of *Historia*, it is perhaps natural that suspicions of elisions and blatant falsifications would arise. A celebrity in the imperial limelight, an exemplar as a virgin warrior, Erauso garnered such fame that the dramatist Juan Pérez de Montalván, one of Lope de Vega's protégés, turned her tale into a play, titled *La Monja Alférez, comedia famosa* (c. 1626). Other documents from the mid-seventeenth century claim to be lost sections from the princes, while some seem to have been written to supplant it entirely. Indeed, in addition to suspicions
that Trigueros falsified parts of the original manuscript, three highly fictionalized relaciones have often been affixed to historical accounts. Gema Areta Marigó mentions Pedro Rubio Merino's recent finding of two Erauso manuscripts in the archives of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Cathedral of Seville, each attributed to the same scribe despite their stark differences (242). This blurring of personal experience and sensationalized myth muddles Historia's narrative beyond debate over authorship. Nevertheless, Rima de Vallbona trusts that somewhere beneath the sediment of tall tales lies the princeps:

[C]onsideramos que en la base del texto de Vida e sucesos subyace el original autógrafo de Catalina de Erauso (o el relato oral de sus aventuras hecho por ella misma), ampliado por interpolaciones de secuencias narrativas increíbles, las cuales no se han podido cometer con documentos relativos a la época o a la misma Monja Alférez. Tales secuencias son las que contribuyeron a la ficcionalización del discurso; ésta, además, queda sustentada por el desenlace de la historia, completamente abierto y lleno de cinismo, el cual encaja más en el modelo de la novela picaresca, que en el pacto autobiográfico. (8)

The upshot of these "interpolaciones" is a first-person account that conflates Catalina with her male persona in Historia and with star-struck writers and mendacious copyists, whose interjections have effaced the narrative I's identity.

With no recourse to parse fiction apart from historical events in the available primary sources, Erauso's self-fashioning takes place both in the text and as the text. The narrative I that switches between the subject of utterance and subject of enunciation without notice is in essence paralleled in Historia's bibliographical history. Put another way, not only is it unclear who is speaking throughout the narrative, but it is also uncertain the extent to which other voices mix with Erauso's in its formation. This confusion is of particular salience to scholars focused on performative deployments of language in historical settings, since within the confines of the manuscript, it is virtually impossible to determine which segments in the narrative point to actual contexts as opposed to ones invented out of sheer expediency or for entertainment value. Moreover, for all of the concern over the accuracy of the copied manuscripts, there remains the possibility that Catalina herself spun as many falsities into her narrative as those superimposed by others. Thus, aside from conclusions gleaned from the historical paper trail, we might conclude that while attempts to distinguish fiction from fact in Historia are certainly laudable, it is more intriguing to examine the complex processes of self-representation that result when the author (a term to be understood in its widest sense) fuses the two together.

Generic Conventions: (Con)text and Erauso's Deictic I

Since the advent of the autobiography in the nineteenth century, readers have grown accustomed to the connection between the author and her first-person I in a written text. As Philippe Lejeune has argued, tinkering with this connection violates the "autobiographical pact" and questions the veracity of the life recounted (3-30). In other words, the author of an autobiography is recognized and recognizes herself as a textual I that should narrate truthfully events and personal changes throughout her life. This recognition occurs usually in a context wherein readers (including the author herself) believe that the autobiography's first-person voice is in fact the same as the person writing it. When the autobiographical pact is thrown into question by stretching the truth, the connection between an author and her textual I is damaged, sometimes irreparably.

Historia bypasses the autobiographical pact by foreclosing on the possibility of discerning between Catalina's voice and that of her masculine persona. Readers are required to decide for themselves whether she or the persona is speaking throughout much of the narrative. This distortion enables Erauso to play with deictic signs at will, assuming the feminine or masculine voice in accordance with the needs of the moment. This same ambiguity also plays out in the narrative events inasmuch as everyone recognizes her as a male while she acts secretly upon her interests as a female. In dressing as a man, Erauso never acknowledges explicitly that she is violating any pre-existing gender norms, since she strives to abide by the generic conventions of the time, presenting herself either as entirely female or male. The conventions that lead her to don male garb stem from two practical desires: to flee from the convent and to capitalize on privileges exclusive to men. Each desire sits squarely within known conventions and hinges on the successful uptake of her disguise, the chief goal of self-fashioning.

The question of uptake from others is key to Catalina de Erauso's successful escape from the convent and invisibility in the midst
of her parents, peers, and the dozens of figures mentioned in Historia. “Passing” as a male, Erauso is aware that the I that she uses around others is a masculine disguise. After modifying her appearance, the fifteen-year-old nun, in fact, re-enters Vitoria and puts her disguise to the test, first with doctor Francisco de Cerralta, who receives her into his home as if she were a man (“sin conocérme”) (Historia 95). Adopting the pseudonym Francisco Loyola, under whose name she lives for seven months as a page serving Juan de Idiáquez, Erauso later encounters her father who, unaware of the identity of her interlocutor, laments the flight of his daughter from the convent. Wracked with guilt, she wanders around Biscay and the Kingdom of Navarre until meandering back to Sr. Sebastian, where she attends mass at the convent in the presence of her mother and fellow nuns. The disguise succeeds once again when Erauso finds passage on a galleon headed for Seville, piloted by her uncle Estevan Eguino, who also fails to recognize her.

Although each event attests to the effectiveness of her disguise, the I Erauso uses in conversation with Dr. Cerralta and Idiáquez interrupts the traditional pattern of signification that equates the subject of utterance with the subject of enunciation. Lejeune explains that the speaking subject is constituted through a split between the individual utterance of I (and other deictic pronouns) in a given context and its enunciation, or performance, as it appears in a written text. To say I, then, both glosses over the changes within a subject of utterance, such as the passage from childhood to adulthood, and “masks . . . the gap that exists between the subject of enunciation and that of utterance” (Lejeune 35). This split takes on another degree of complexity when Erauso disguises herself as a male, who becomes an artificial subject of utterance concealing the real one. Still, up to this point readers remain aware of her elaborate farce because she remains in character for almost two decades. But this awareness rests on Erauso’s account of the visual transformation instrumental to her sustained disguise. From this perspective, her behavior seems to coincide fully with that of a Spanish alférez, with a handful of suitors and an unexplained ability to win duels and capture flags. She even resorts to additional measures to disguise her biological sex with artificial breast reduction, as Pedro de la Valledescribes in a manuscript of 1677:

Ella es de estatura grande i abultada para mujer, bien que por ella no parezca no ser hombre. No tiene pechos: que desde muy muchacha

What this elaborate persona reflects is the desire for a freedom by nature exclusive to men, one assured by reducing the probability of detection. It may even be a vehicle to fulfill same-sex inclinations up to the point of total exposure, a hovering tension in the text that Mary Elizabeth Perry observes in “several episodes in the New World suggest[ing] that other women were attracted to her and that she may have felt some attraction, too” (399). Nonetheless, Erauso gives no explicit signs of identifying emotionally with her persona beyond the fact it affords her greater freedom.

The passage from feminine to masculine also signals self-fashioning on a textual level, one that fuses both into the polyvalent I we encounter in Erauso’s narrative. This slippage does not seem obvious in the first instance when she risks discovery. After her engagement to doña Beatriz de Cárdenas at the behest of Juan de Urquiza, she insists that “tal casamiento no había que tratar, porque por todo el mundo yo no lo haría” (Historia 104–05). Contrasting with Erauso’s resistance to Beatriz’s advances is her openness to intimacy while staying in Lima as a guest of Diego Solarte, a wealthy merchant with two unwed sisters-in-law who are fond of Antonio. Whereas Erauso rejects the advances of Beatriz outright, here she becomes sufficiently comfortable with physical affection that Solarte expels her from the premises:

Al cabo de nueve meses me dijo que buscarse mi vida en otra parte; y fue la causa que tenia en casa dos doncellas hermanas de su mujer, con las cuales, y sobre todo con una que más se me inclinó, solía yo más jugar y triscar. Y un día, estando en el estrado peinándome acostado en sus faldas, andándole en las piernas, llegó a ser un rojo por donde nos vio y oyó a ella que me decía que fuese al Potosí y buscar dinero, y nos casaríamos. Soporté, y de allí a un poco me llamó y me pidió y tomó cuentas, y despidiéme y fuíme. (Historia 109)

In spite of her actions, at no point do the maidens or Solarte see the attraction as anything but heterosexual. From a textual perspective, however, where Erauso’s intentions are vague, there is no mode of determining if “se me inclinó” and the “yo” who decides to “jugar y triscar” with one of the maidens is a mere performance or a sincere inclination.
It is worth noting that a two-month interval separates these episodes, during which Erauso travels to Trujillo where, after finding work in a store, three men from Saña arrive to avenge a friend's death. Here, she is seen and sees herself as Antonio, both responsible for the homicide in Saña and quick to draw her sword again, in spite of the legal consequences that send her packing to Lima. Just as she faces the disappointment of Urquiza and confusion of Beatriz, Erauso refrains from revealing herself to avoid these repercussions and thus clings to her disguise. Yet she seems to let her guard down, perhaps stepping outside of character altogether, as she lets one of the maidens brush her hair while lying in her lap. Furthermore, Erauso seems more than willing to reciprocate, pleasing the maiden by "andándome en las piernas" and assenting, at least tacitly, to eloping in Potosí. A similar episode takes place later on in Tucumán when a prosperous mestiza offers her daughter's hand in marriage, which Erauso rebuffs not for fear of discovery, but rather because she was "muy negra y fea como un diablo, muy contraria a mi gusto, que fue siempre de buenas caras" (Historia 122).

The I and the actions linked to it in these scenes illustrate the ambiguity that occurs on a textual level, an aporia that obstructs our ability to distinguish Catalina from her masculine persona. As James Pancrario observes, Solarte's "position behind the barred windows serves as an allegory for the reader's position both inside and outside of the text. Within the text the readers of Erauso's body are consistently unable to decipher, identify and see the transvestite" (469). Erauso scholars who view this episode as conclusive evidence of her homosexuality fail to acknowledge the potential for utterances to differ from enunciations, for Catalina's concealed intentions to diverge from Antonio's ostensible ones. "Mi gusto" for Antonio undoubtedly carries a sexual connotation; for Catalina, on the other hand, it may be or may not be part of her disguise (Historia 122). Whatever the case, her sexual orientation is far from uncertain. Though she believes that Erauso was homosexual, Eva Mendieta correctly points out that "[s]o completely was the phallus identified with the sexual act that many women who fell in love with other women could not identify their feelings" (166). Likewise, Adrienne Laskier Martín contends that several episodes in Historia are of "clearly homocrotic transcendance," though she is careful to stress that "neither homosexuality nor lesbianism existed as a social category, much less as social identity" (143–44). Yet if Historia's utterances and enunciations amalgamate in a single voice, then such conclusions amount to little more than speculation, especially in the absence of the original manuscript, itself lost since the late eighteenth century. One problem with the studies mentioned above is that they presuppose a reader incapable of overcoming Western gender categories. A more significant flaw, however, is that they conflate Erauso's actual intentions with performative actions, which assumes that Catalina identified sincerely with everything her masculine persona did beyond upholding the disguise.

Subject to the wear of time, Erauso's narrative is emptied of the context established in the moment of the events themselves and, consequently, leads to wildly differing interpretations. This is, of course, part and parcel of written language, where words fail to capture the totality of the self at the moment of composition and in subsequent readings. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, a written sign is a "mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription, and which can give rise to an iteration both in the absence of and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who . . . has emitted or produced it" (92). In the absence of the empirical author, these iterations not only make Erauso's citations of male speech and behavior successful in the first place, but also erase the contextual traces they leave behind. With no context to hold on to, attempts to determine whether Catalina or Antonio is speaking and acting in moments of ambiguity displace the cycle of self-fashioning onto the text itself.

Genre and Selfhood

The available discourses of self-representation in the seventeenth century were relatively limited; that is, they were not tailored to free-floating explorations of selfhood, nor were they a means of assuming a critical distance from the body politic like Enlightenment philosophes. These pseudo-autobiographical discourses were instead models in which nobles, clergymen, nuns, and soldiers demonstrated their adherence to the social conventions of the period. In early modern Spain, there were two predominant genres of self-representation: one, a confessional genre in the vein of St. Augustine's Confessions, in essence, stylized examinations of conscience scrutinizing an individual's words and deeds throughout their life, necessarily culminating in a proclamation.
of sinfulness, petition for divine mercy, and submission to the will of God; the other, the libro de vida, a declaredly outward-focused genre, ranging from histories and chronicles documented in the first person to narrativized resumés of prominent military, governmental, and ecclesiastical figures.

According to Rainer Goetz, the “experiential” vida genre refines earlier genres that use an “empirical I” with the explicit intent of fostering “fame and to ensure the memory of his heroic and often marvelous accomplishments, whose authenticity is supported by verifiable historical information” (96). In addition, there is a surprising quantity of texts in this second genre written by, or at least attributed to, peasants, merchants, and the occasional ruffian, a few of which recall picaresque novels of the same period. While the libro de vida narrated the lives of more men than women, religious women produced spiritual autobiographies that have achieved canonical status, such as Santa Teresa de Ávila’s Libro de la vida (1562). Nevertheless, women of the period faced a stigma against writing per se, to say nothing of writing about themselves. Those who lived in the relative security of the convent often received an education, like Erasmus, although they were expected to act as docile and silent as uneducated women, “bowing to and praising the rules of silence and of ‘holy ignorance’ for women promulgated by the Council of Trent” while they “discussed the very themes of silence and knowledge” (Arenal and Schlau 28). Consequently, female self-representation was choked to a trickle by the “restricciones ideológicas que suponía exponer la realidad del sujeto por escrito y desvelar la intimidad, es decir, el paso de lo privado a lo público, que era prerrogativa del hombre” (Esteban 54). Since the vida genre was typically for males, Erasmus opted to describe herself as one in Historia for as long as feasible. Decades after she had first donned her disguise, she was forced to reveal herself as a cross-dressed nun while receiving treatment for a wound under the care of the Bishop of Guamanga. For much of the narrative before and even after her revelation—such as in the memorial to King Philip IV—she opted to write about herself as a male in a model associated generally with males, such that her transvestism takes on a figural dimension that Pancrazio ventures to call “transvested autobiography” (455). From this perspective, Erasmus’s selfhood is as much a problem of genre as it is visual or semantic slippage.

In order to unpack the genre-genre dynamic, it is important to note that Historia is coherent because Erasmus’s masculine persona is virtually indistinguishable from the first-person voice in Alonso Enríquez de Guzmán’s Libro de la vida y costumbres (1536) or in comparable narratives by Jerónimo de Pasamonte (1605) and Alonso de Contreras (1630). Although each narrative constitutes yet another contribution to the vida genre, this does not imply that genres as such are beyond alteration. After all, if Erasmus were unable to incorporate the vida into her disguise, texts like Historia would have never surfaced. Hence, far from the static features that Aristotle adumbrates in his Poetics, genres are more like emergent bodies of conventionalized discourse that range from brief utterances to hefty written texts. Each contribution to a particular genre is both a reification of its perceived characteristics and an alteration thereof, a process that linguistic anthropologists Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman understand as the “creation of intertextual relationships” that at once “renders texts ordered, unified, and bounded, on the one hand, and fragmented, heterogeneous, and open-ended, on the other” (147). Works comprising a genre exhibit similar formal characteristics, less out of adherence to an assumed norm than an effort to sustain the tone and coherence of a conversation. And just as most conversations occur in a specific register and follow a particular trajectory, so too do works constitutive of a given genre reinforce it by responding to what has been said while simultaneously adding something new.

As Mikhail Bakhtin stresses in his theorization of speech genres, linguistic utterances of any kind always occur with potential interlocutors in mind. These utterances draw heavily on particular syntactical and lexical formations their users inherit and put to use. Distinct applications of utterances reflect an ongoing process of generation, evolution, and extinction that elucidates how genres rise and eventually fall into disuse, as well as explaining their synchronic variations, all of which Bakhtin incorporates into his theory:

We assimilate forms of language only in forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms. The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and are in close connection with one another. To learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances... (78)
In this regard, a genre arises out of a conversation of texts reacting to one another, speaking to one another, building upon one another; it is not an \textit{a priori} set of formal principles by which writers abide. Of course, expertise in generic conventions may prove useful to those who seek to apply a genre outside its typical applications. A case in point is Erauso, who, as a literate soldier, developed an intimate familiarity with the \textit{vida} genre, and for that very reason was able to mold it to her designs as deftly as she did.

For Erauso to conceal herself in masculine attire and discourse is thus an imitation of masculine behavior that, while constituting a "performance" in the sense described above, allows her to reap the benefits of appropriating the \textit{vida} genre. What this requires is the constant invocation of the speech and behavior of a quintessential Spanish tercio, to wit, a short temper, a penchant for gambling, and hyperbolic bravado in the face of danger, whether taking on the civil authorities or the Araucanians. Goetz reminds us that Erauso's "violent altercation with other men originate from a seemingly overzealous preoccupation with male honor: she is quick to feel insulted or slighted, and equally quick to prove her manliness with the sword" (102–03). For example, each chapter title provides a brief description of its contents, most of the time referring to her travel from one city to another. But they just as often emphasize acts of gallantry or the violence characteristic of the \textit{vida} genre, such as “De Saña pasa a Trujillo. Mata a uno,” “Pasa a Paicabbi, hallase en la batalla de Valdivia, gana una bandera,” “Pasa a la ciudad de la Paz: mata a uno” or “Mata en el Cuzco al nuevo Cid quedando herida” (107, 108, 144, 152). Some passages read like transcriptions of a \textit{libro de caballerías} into the first person, such as Erauso's ascent to the rank of lieutenant or the daring escape with doña María Dávalos from her pistol-toting husband. Soon after joining the campaign against the Araucanians in Chile alongside her brother, she enters into battle in which a number of captains and the company's lieutenant perish when repelling an attack on their encampment in Valdivia. The Araucanians are eventually driven into retreat, but not before one of them bears off the royal standard. Dishonored, Erauso and two other soldiers storm after him to retrieve it:

\begin{quote}
Llegamos a la bandera, cayó de un bote de lanza mi compañero. Yo recibí un mal golpe en la pierna, maté al cacique que la llevaba y quité sola, y apreté con mi caballo, atropellándolo, matando e hiriendo a infinidad,
\end{quote}

We quickly learn that Erauso's valor earns both the respect of her fellow soldiers and praise from the local governor, who commends her with the flag she had retrieved. These tokens of recognition culminate in her promotion to the rank of lieutenant in the company of Alfonso Moreno, thereby staking a position of honor by standards of seventeenth-century Spanish society.

Erauso finds another opportunity to demonstrate her awareness of chivalric principles when two panicked friars beg her to rush doña María Dávalos out of Cochabamba after her husband Pedro de Chavarría learns of her affair with don Antonio Calderón. In avenging his honor, Chavarría first murders Calderón and begins looking for his spouse to do the same. Without hesitation, Erauso hoists doña Dávalos onto her horse and gallops out of town under cover of night. Both stop to rest in a highway inn, a pause that gives Chavarría ample time to catch up to them on his horse in what turns into a suspenseful chase scene, ending in a sword-fight inside a church in La Plata. Referring to doña Dávalos as “mi alegida,” Erauso paints herself as a dashing hero who, when recounting the incident to the local authorities, persuades them that “no había más que haber corrido repetidamente y una mujer que se me arrojó, huyendo de la muerte, pasándola al convento de su madre, como ella lo pidió" (\textit{Historia} 140–41). The dilemma resolves as it would in any \textit{libro de caballertas}, with the opponent routed, the damsel safe, and the hero glorified, in this case among Dávalos' fellow nuns.

These action sequences resemble those of other \textit{libros de vida} mentioned above. Although \textit{vida} narrators vary in career vocation and education, each typically rationalizes his or her actions in accordance within the limitations of his or her ascribed status in hopes of grabbing the attention of readers higher up on the estamental ladder. As Margarita Levisi points out, the typical \textit{vida} narrative "gives itself over to practical objectives, at least for this social group, . . . [r]om from this communicative effort, they hope for a practical gain, be it an economic benefit, the attainment of social advancement or self-justification" (113). Curiously, much of the scholarship on \textit{Historia} has misconstrued self-justification as a strategy for survival as a homosexual woman in an oppressive patriarchal society. But it is doubtful that Erauso would have
foregrounded her status as a woman in the narrative, since it would conflict with her objective to secure a pension by blurring traditional gender roles, thereby obviating the reason to write that narrative in the first place. For example, the switch from feminine to masculine declension in self-referential verbs after Erauso dons her disguise is sometimes interpreted as deliberate gender bending, an interpretation that overlooks two more feasible explanations: first, she escapes from the monastery in hopes of a better life; secondly, she changes “a” to “o” in the verbs and past participles in conformity with gender (and genre) conventions, which revert to the feminine after her confession to the Bishop of Guamanga. While Erauso’s disguise does cause gender confusion, as we have observed, this does not extend beyond visual and textual masking to alter her identity.

Indeed, mimicking typical vida narratives, Erauso couches her demands in terms any Spanish soldier would use, defending the evangelical and material interests of the Hapsburg monarch. The details of the official document or “memorial” containing her request are omitted in Historia, where it is only clear that she delivers it to Philip himself and subsequently receives a pension of 800 escudos (Historia 169). In the memorial itself these demands are quite explicit, starting with a recounting of her prowess in the military:

El Alférez dona Catalina de Erauso... ha diez y nueve años pasó a las provincias del Perú en ahitó de barón, por particular inclinación que tuvo de ejercitar las armas, en defensa de la fe católica y el servicio de vuestra majestad y que los quince dellos ha asistido en las guerras de las provincias de Chile, sin ser conocida, hasta que bolió al Perú, donde por varios sucesos descubrió serlo. Y por certificaciones que ha presentado consta entró en el dicho Reyno de Chile por soldado en el dicho ahitó de barón de la compañía del Maese de Campo don Diego Bravo de Sarabía, y sirvió en ella, hallándose muchas beces en campaña, y después pasó a la del Capitán Gonzalo Rodríguez y por sus honrados y abrenatados servicios fue nombrado por Alférez de la dicha compañía... (Valibona 131)

Note that dressing in masculine clothing to fulfill a purported “inclination” towards arms obfuscates the incident of abuse that originally motivated her escape. Yet it seems more probable that Erauso cross-dressed not to sate desires to brandish a sword, but rather to avoid further abuse. Years of devoted service on Philip IV’s behalf and the “fee católica” are intended to expiate her sartorial infraction, which is but a means to attaining honor:

[Ha parecido que] aun[que] el andar en hábito de varón es cosa prohibida, ya que ha sucedido, y con él ha servido tantos años y con tanto valor en guerra tan porfiada y continua, y recibido heridas, será muy de la real mano de vuestra majestad hazella merecido con que pueda sustentarse y recogerse, y que ésta podrá ser de quinientos pesos de a 8 reales de renta por su vida en las provincias del Perú, en pensión sobre encomienda de Yndios, y en cuanto a sí se le mandara que ande en hábito de muger, remitido a vuestra majestad para que mande lo que fuere más servido, por[que] no se le conoce inclinación a mudar del que aora trae, [que] es de varón. (Valibona 131)

Legalistic parlance aside, both passages from Erauso’s brief memorial frame her situation in the same manner as Historia, namely through speaking as a seasoned tercio with nearly two decades of unrenumerated service behind her and downplaying her sex. Even if we believe her “inclination” towards a soldier’s life is sincere, it is no less part of her generic performance by way of a vida narrative. Erauso does begin to cross-dress early and relies on recognition as a male, yet she does so to make her case understandable through the vida genre and, as the memorial makes clear, to secure a pension from the Crown. This is corroborated when she requests a special dispensation to wear men’s clothing from the Pope, who, in spite of personal reservations, grants her request under the condition that she commit no murders out of revenge. In other words, what Erauso demands is not the recognition of a male subjectivity per se, but instead, a personal favor that accompanies the material benefits pursued by soldiers and vida writers.

Beyond the self-justification for the sake of material gain, the archetypical vida seldom gives signs of the narrator’s interiority where forms of self-representation would reside. Considering that the narrative’s audience consists of potential benefactors, to disclose one’s emotions or particular worldview would be irrelevant, if not counter-productive. Erauso’s public acclamation has much more to do with her years of military service than recognition of an authentic subjectivity. During a visit to St. Peter’s Basilica at the height of her fame, a Cardinal jokingly tells her that “no tenía más falta que ser Español,” to which she retorts, “[a] mí me parece, señor, debajo de la corrección de vuestra señoría ilustrísima, que no tengo otra cosa buena” (Historia 174). Far
from expressing a deviant subjectivity, her reply demonstrates both adherence to the demeanor expected of soldiers and zealous loyalty to the Crown, all part of the generic performance in discussion.

Rather than articulating a fixed identity, Erasmo appropriates the libro de vida genre in a strategic manner to pose as and gain recognition as a male. In so doing, she throws into question deeply entrenched assumptions surrounding the processes by which genres are forged and evolve. Countermanding the supposition that a writer is constrained by a crystallized set of generic norms is the notion that genres are conventionalized yet flexible platforms for textual dialogue. Each addition to this dialogue at once reflects perceived formal characteristics while simultaneously altering them. Such alterations vary in scope, but each takes an active role in genre formation. Erasmo’s Historia is a fascinating rejoinder in the vida dialogue inasmuch as she grasped the performative value of penning a work in that genre. The textual self-fashioning in her vida accomplishes what she was unable to do in male garb alone, notwithstanding two decades of successful cross-dressing: elude convent life, collect a soldier’s pension, and gain notoriety in Spain and Italy to boot. What Erasmo demonstrates with Historia, then, is that genre potentiates an expansion of selfhood, of a deictic I, into textual form, thereby bolstering the writing subject’s agency even under the most adverse of circumstances.

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NOTES

1 The full title of the princeps is Vida i sucesos de la Monja Alferez, o Alferez Catarina, D. Catarina de Arasigo doncella, natural de San Sebastian, provincia de Guipuzcoa. Escrita por ella misma en 18 de Septiembre de 1646 volviendo de las Indias a España en el galeón San José, Capitán Andrés Ocon, en la flota de Nueva España, General D. Juan de Benavides, General de la Armada Tomada de la Roplaza, que llegó a Cádiz en 18 de noviembre de 1646 (Valbona 31–32).

2 One of the appendices in the Valbona edition lists all known manuscripts and other texts relevant to the Erasmo case. It mentions three letters from Cartegena de Indias dated before 1620, ten relaciones published from 1625 to 1653, and all publications in book form starting with Didot’s 1829 edition. Because of their centrality in some historical studies in spite of gross inaccuracies, three of the relaciones are reproduced in another appendix. The first two appeared in Spain in 1625 shortly after Historia’s publication, while the third was published in Mexico in 1653, a few years after Erasmo’s death. Valbona observes that notwithstanding their lack of literary merit and empirical basis, much of the scholarship on Historia has taken these relaciones as factual (4). The first edition of the Spanish manuscript was published by Medina in Madrid under the title Relación prodigiosa de las grandes batallas, y valores hechos que una muger hizo en quarenta años que sirvió a Su Majestad en el Reyno de Chile y otros del Perú, y Nueva España, en auíto de Soldado, y los honoros oficios militares que tubo armas, sin que fuese conocida por el muger, hasta que le fues fuerza el descubrirse. A second version was published in Seville the same year under the title Segunda parte de la relación de la Monja Alferez, y dizease en ella cosas admirables, y fidealgas de los valores hechos desta muger; de lo bien que empleó el tiempo en servicio de nuestro Rey y señor. Nearly three decades later a third relación was published as the Ultima y tercera relación en que se hace veradera del resto de la vida de la Monja Alferez, sus memorables virtudes, y exemplar muerte en estos Reynos de Nueva España.

3 Seized upon by the luminaries of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, the dichotomy between the subject of utterance and the subject of enunciation originated in Émile Benveniste’s 1958 essay “Subjectivity in Language” (223–30). According to Benveniste, language potentiates human intercommunication by positing a subject in discourse. Implicit or explicit depending on the rules of grammar specific to a language, the personal pronoun I is the sine qua non of communication and the founding of subjectivity. It is through the development of personal pronouns that the notion of a person originated, and it is “in the instance of discourse in which I designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself as the ‘subject’” (Benveniste 226). Of course, I cannot refer to a specific subject speaking; it instead establishes the subject’s position deictically in a discursive exchange. To overcome the generality of personal pronouns such as I requires a distinction between the discursive I, or the subject of enunciation, and the speaker outside of language, or the subject of utterance. As Benveniste puts it, “I refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker. It is a term that cannot be identified except in what we have called elsewhere an instance of discourse and that has only a momentary reference” (226).

4 Though occasionally inaccurate, the dates Erasmo provides begin with escape from the convent in March of 1600, followed by a few years of wandering until joining the campaign against the Araucanians in 1604. Only after her skirmish in Cuzco is she forced to reveal herself as a female, a remarkable feat considering this did not happen until 1620. It is worth noting that her entire military career takes place during the reign of Philip III (1598–1621), who dies before Erasmo secures passage to Spain in 1624. Nevertheless, his successor Philip IV is not reluctant to provide her with a modest pension and even jets her after a group of highway bandits rob her party on route to Barcelona (Historia 170).

5 Just as in anthropology and other ethnographic disciplines, intentionality is something of a tiger trap for literary scholars, especially those who cannot interrogate the
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critics of the early twenty-first century, the young escape “apparently identified herself” as male early in her life, disguised herself as a male, and succeeded in gaining acceptance for her male identity even after she had to reveal herself as a woman” (Perry 394–95).

WORKS CITED


6 For examples of Erauso’s alleged quest for (homosexual) identity, see Espeban (20, 23), Juárez (186), and Velasco (8).

7 As in the manuscripts, Erauso’s frequent switching from masculine to feminine adjectives and pronouns may be the result of copyist errors and editorial decisions. Readers fascinated by the linguistic force she appears to put on should thus exercise caution by considering the variance of gender markers between manuscripts. Early into her introduction of Vida i sucesors, Vallbona notes that Erauso’s native Basque may have interfered with the Castilian script, evidenced by the absence of grammatical gender distinctions in Basque and the awkward syntax throughout the manuscript (8, 35). But we may counter this argument on two fronts: biographical and grammatical. In agreement with Mendieta, we know that Erauso entered the convent at a very young age where she learned Latin and Castilian, well before her escape to the Americas, where Castilian was likely the only language she spoke with her compatriots. From a linguistic perspective, the influence of Basque may have impacted the syntax in the original manuscript, but had little effect on adjective and pronoun declensions. Mendieta and Velasco both observe that male-female declensions occur only in reference to Erauso (42, 7). If the effect of Basque were strong, we would find an arbitrary pattern of errors. That declensions vary between manuscripts is less important than their exclusivity to Erauso alone. Even Vallbona observes that “[e]n los pasajes de correo, filtro, amor, utiliza el masculino; igual en los de la guerra y los duelos. Sin embargo, cuando el registro es neutro, la narradora-protagonista vuelve al uso del femenino” (52nd). While both the Basque and gender game hypotheses are inconclusive, it is plausible that Erauso declined certain words depending on the context of enunciation. In keeping with the strictures of a soldier’s relación, speaking as a man maintains her disguise and conforms to generic expectations.

8 However, most studies on Historia, especially those drawing on gender theory, cite Perry’s article published in Queer Iberia (1994), contending that Erauso’s decision to cross-dress arises from her desire to express a gender identity that subverts the clear-cut gender dichotomies of seventeenth-century Europe. Similar to the teenage identity
Palabras claves: subjetividad, Catalina de Erauso, género, travestismo, autobiografía, barroco.

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Fantasies of Masculinity in Emilia Pardo Bazán’s Memorias de un solterón

Este artículo examina el conflicto entre dos modelos de masculinidad en Memorias de un solterón. El modelo antiguo se basa en la herencia y el estilo de vida aristocrática. El modelo moderno, en cambio, es mayoritariamente urbano y burgués, y enfatiza la capacidad del hombre para mantener una familia a base de su propio trabajo. La persistencia del Antiguo Régimen y el atraso económico español con respecto a otros países europeos del siglo XIX dificultan a los personajes de Memorias el cumplimiento de la masculinidad moderna. La preocupación del narrador, Mauro Pareja, por este atraso y por las dificultades económicas asociadas con el matrimonio lo llevan a rechazar los preceptos de este modelo moderno de masculinidad. Mientras tanto, otro personaje, Benicio Neira, vive precariamente entre dos clases (la aristocracia y la burguesía), pero no se acopla ni al modelo antiguo de masculinidad ni al moderno. Aunque parezca que Mauro y Benicio se convierten en “hombres de verdad” al final de la novela, sus transformaciones se mantienen como falsas, ficticias o anacrónicas. De este modo, la novela muestra la dificultad de seguir las normas de la masculinidad moderna en la España decimonónica.

As its title suggests, Emilia Pardo Bazán’s Memorias de un solterón (1896) is ostensibly the memoir of its narrator, Mauro Pareja. It is also a sequel to two previous Pardo Bazán novels, La Tribuna (1883) and Doña Milagros (1894). Memorias continues the stories of Ramón, the illegitimate child of La Tribuna’s Baltasar Sobrado and Amparo Rosendo, and of Benicio Neira, the long-suffering patriarch in Doña Milagros. Most scholars have read Memorias as an “explicitly feminist novel” because of its depiction of Benicio Neira’s daughter, Feita, as la mujer nueva, who earns money as a private tutor, dreams of living on her own in Madrid, and advocates for women’s independence (Bretz